



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### WILDLIFE SERVICE FAILS TO VERIFY EARLY REPORTS OF THIRD FAMILY GROUP OF WHOOPERS

Reports which seemed to indicate the possibility of three family groups of whooping cranes in the southern migration have not been verified, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior reported today.

Only two family groups of whoopers, both of which are safe at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, have been located, the Service said.

During their long migration from Wood Buffalo Park near Great Slave Lake in Canada to their winter home in Aransas, the flight of the rare whooping cranes was logged by hundreds of persons interested in their welfare.

Some of the earlier reports suggested the possibility of three family groups but a check of all available data indicates that the only families in the migration are the two now on the refuge.

The crane which was wounded or otherwise injured during the flight south and which was reported at several places along the migration route valiantly trying to reach the refuge has not arrived nor has there been any report on it for weeks.

A recent winter count showed only 23 whoopers but the 24th crane which had been noted last fall and then lost for several weeks has been sighted on that portion of the huge King ranch nearest the refuge. There are three whooping cranes in captivity, making a total of 27 birds still living out of the thousands which once lived in North America.

Until about Christmas time, refuge personnel report, the birds had been erratic in establishing territories. In fact, for two weeks or more during November several of the whoopers were not sighted in aerial or ground surveys of the refuge. However, the 24 cranes now seem to be settled for the winter. These include four which are probably the pair of adults and twins observed last year, two pairs each with one young-of-the-year, five other pairs and three additional adults, plus the one just located on the King ranch.

A year ago there were 28 cranes on the refuge. Six of these were young. One adult crane disappeared during the winter, presumably a victim of a predator. One remained on the refuge or near it all during the summer, and one was injured and is now in the zoo at San Antonio, Texas. Out of the group which went north last spring four have failed to return and have not been seen elsewhere.

The highest number of cranes on the refuge since 1938 has been 34; the lowest, 15.

There is another development with respect to the whoopers this winter. Tidal marshes and sloughs within that part of Matagorda Island close to the Aransas Refuge have been used consistently by some of the whooping cranes in previous years. However, these areas, under private control, were diked during 1956 and no cranes have been observed on that portion of their former range following the dike construction.

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